

Wisconsin. Involved in local politics since 1976, John is a dedicated public servant and a good friend. I will miss his leadership as mayor, but I am confident he will remain active in our community and influential in improving the quality of life in western Wisconsin.

Born and raised in La Crosse, Mayor Medinger and his family have always been active in local politics and have contributed immensely to the growth and development of our community. His father, Don, a good union member, served on the La Crosse City Council and was well-respected throughout the area. Following his father's example of civic duty, John ran for and was elected to the Wisconsin State Assembly in 1986, where he served for the next 16 years.

From 1993 to 1996, he worked for U.S. Senator RUSS FEINGOLD as his western Wisconsin regional coordinator, and in 1996 he ran for and was elected mayor of La Crosse. During his tenure as mayor, he continually advocated for social justice on behalf of the hard-working families in western Wisconsin. His contributions and dedication to the community made him an excellent mentor, and our area has been well served by his leadership.

I have known John for many years and have admired his thoughtfulness, idealism, unwavering principles, and ability to reach across party lines to create good public policy. As mayor, he was always honest and never hesitated to tell you when he thought you were wrong. Likewise, he was the first to embrace a good idea and work to put a plan into action.

Lastly, I commend John for his tireless work to encourage and welcome greater racial diversity, which has made the La Crosse area a special place to live and raise a family.

John exemplifies all that is good, noble, and decent in public service. He believes in our representative democracy, and he made himself approachable and accessible to anyone who wanted to share their thoughts with him, whether it was when he showed up on their doorstep during the course of his many campaigns or during his time in office.

Both John and his wife, Dee, have sacrificed greatly to live a life of public service. If anyone deserves a break from the public spotlight, they do. Although John Medinger is retiring from the mayoral position, his advocacy and community work will leave a lasting legacy on the La Crosse community, and the area will continue to benefit from all that he has done.

I want to thank him for his hard work and dedication, and I wish Dee and John the best of luck in their future endeavors.

IN MEMORY OF MARINE LANCE CORPORAL WESLEY JOEL CANNING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, "I don't do it for the money, I don't do it for the glory. Providing for our future is my responsibility. I can't call in sick on Mondays when the weekend has been too strong. I just work straight through the holidays and sometimes all night long. You can bet that I stand ready when the wolf growls at the door. I am solid, I am steady, I am true down to the core."

This is taken from Toby Keith's "American Soldier." And, Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honor of a young American Marine from a tranquil town in southeast Texas of approximately 34,000 people, Marine Lance Corporal Wesley Joel Canning, who died valiantly serving our country and our Nation in Iraq. He was assigned to the 2nd Assault Amphibian Battalion, 2nd Marine Division, II Marine Expeditionary Force based at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

Lance Corporal Canning, in just 21 short years, had already exhibited a lifetime of courage and boldness. He was killed in combat on November 10, 2004, in Al Anbar Province, Iraq, during the successful American offensive against the insurgent enemy in Fallujah.

He was a native of Friendswood, Texas. Wes, as he was called by his friends and family, graduated from Friendswood High School in 2002 and left for boot camp in July, just 2 months after his graduation. Resolute about becoming a Marine since his junior year, he had approached his parents with the idea. His father, Joe Canning, recalls their hesitations: "He decided he wanted to become a Marine," his father said. "Spend 20 years in the service and pursue a career in the criminal justice system. I tried my best to talk him out of it, telling him to go and get a good education, but he was hooked on becoming a Marine. And after doing everything I asked him to do, talking to recruiters from the other branches of service and friends and relatives who had served, he seemed more convinced than ever that the Marines was absolutely the right thing for him to do." In the end, "His mom and I gave him our blessing."

The devastating terrorist attack on September 11, which occurred before he ever graduated from high school, further fueled this desire. According to his mother, Jo Ellen Canning, "9/11 didn't deter his efforts. He wanted all the more to go and protect his country."

He graduated from the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego. He steadfastly pursued a post that would allow him to see action. Open for deployment

in Iraq, he stayed at Camp Pendleton in California rather than accept another assignment.

In mid-March of 2003, with the commencement of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Lance Corporal Canning's wish came true. "He went to the front lines at the beginning of the war. There was not much telephone contact, so we watched TV the whole time until he made it home," Mrs. Canning recounts. In a letter to his parents that month, he described going in with the initial push and penetrating Baghdad.

He then returned to Texas after completing his first of ultimately two tours he volunteered for in Iraq. He excitedly did two things that, as his dad told me, "they advise the boys not to do." He trekked out to Lone Star Ford, bought a new little black pickup truck, so he could show his band of Marine brothers back at the base in North Carolina his proudly displayed bumper sticker, "Don't Mess With Texas." He also wedded his sweetheart from Fort Collins, Chayla.

Married just 11 months, and only 11 months, he was once again deployed in September of 2004 to Iraq, where he was looking forward to participating in the training of Iraqi soldiers and police. Now he is a husband, a family man, and he decided to serve 4 years, go back to school, and build a life with his new bride, Chayla, who, in spite of the obvious strain, loved being a Marine wife. She said, "Wes wanted to protect our family so our little brothers wouldn't have to. He was very protective of everybody."

Two months after being deployed to Iraq for a second tour, he left the following voice mail message for his father, who could not answer the phone because he was working on an offshore oil rig: "Hey, Dad, it's me. I love you and miss you. We're still over here."

Two days later, Lance Corporal Canning was killed in action precisely on the 229th birthday of the United States Marine Corps, November 10, 2004.

Myrlene Kennedy, the principal of Wes's high school, recalls, "He was kind to students and adults alike. He had a quick smile, a captivating personality, and that allowed him to have many friends." Wes's teachers said, "He knew pretty much what he wanted to do. Following his ambition, he joined the United States Marine Corps after graduation in 2002. He began that journey he dreamed of and talked about with teachers and friends. He loved wearing his Marine Corps T-shirt to class his senior year."

Wes's philosophy was written in his own high school yearbook: "Everything happens for a reason." For the Marine Corps Reserve Unit in Galveston, Texas, a unit like the one Lance Corporal Canning was a part of, his death constituted the first time it had to bring home one of its own flag-draped caskets, the flag that was presented to Chayla, in addition to the

Purple Heart Lance Corporal Canning was awarded. When asked by a reporter if she deemed her son a hero, Mrs. Canning swiftly replied, "He's always been a hero."

Today, in Operation Iraqi Freedom, the United States Marine Corps alone has lost 49 Texans in combat-related casualties. While our military cannot replace individuals of exceptional character like Lance Corporal Canning, I believe his service will provide a sterling example for the men and women who carry forward his tenacious fight against terror, tyranny, and treachery.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, just this last week, April 1, which would have been Lance Corporal Canning's 22nd birthday, marked another momentous occasion, his best friend, Jason Powell, graduated from the United States Marine Corps Depot that had christened Lance Corporal Canning.

Lance Corporal Canning, as LeAnn Womack said, achieved "something, something worth leaving behind." He has touched other lives and inspired a fellow man to carry the torch and legacy of the Corps. Moreover, Lance Corporal Canning helped establish a democracy in Iraq, this historic start which I was privileged to observe on January 30 in a land far, far away.

I believe if today we could hear from Lance Corporal Canning himself, as a member once and always of the United States Marines, as a member of the few and the proud, he would resonate the remainder of Toby Keith's American Soldier: "And I will always do my duty no matter what the price. I have counted up the cost, I know the sacrifice. I don't want to die for you but if dying is asked of me, I will bear that cross with honor 'cause freedom don't come free. I am out here on the front line. Sleep in peace tonight. I am an American soldier, an American, an American Soldier."

So, Mr. Speaker, we extend our prayers, our condolences to his parents, relatives, fellow students at Friendswood High School in Texas, and his beloved wife. May this American hero's devotion to his country continue to kindle our dreams and ambitions as a free and independent people.

So Semper Fi, Lance Corporal Canning. Semper Fi.

□ 1630

BAYLOR SCORES NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DANIEL E. LUNGREN of California). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Speaker, national champions, that is what the American people can now call the Baylor University women's basketball team. Last night the Baylor Lady

Bears convincingly won the national championship by beating a talented Michigan State team 84-62. It is the second largest margin in a NCAA women's basketball final. It is the first Big 12 team, men or women's, to win a national basketball championship.

The Baylor Bears were one of only four teams in NCAA history, men or women's, to beat three number one teams in the Final 16. That accomplishment is impressive in and of itself, but what is incredible is just 5 years ago the Baylor Bears basketball team was at the bottom of the Big 12.

Mr. Speaker, the important message of this great American success story is that the values of hard work, determination and teamwork truly make a difference.

A key part of that team is Coach Kim Mulkey-Robertson, who became coach at Baylor just 5 years ago, taking over a program with a losing season and at the bottom of the Big 12 ladder. Coach Mulkey-Robertson would be the first to give credit to her tremendous and inspired players on the Baylor team, but she also deserves credit for bringing out that inspiration, and for teaching those students to be their best and then to even be better.

I congratulate Coach Mulkey-Robertson for being the first woman in NCAA basketball history to be a player on a national basketball championship team and then to be the coach of a national championship team. I believe all Americans can be proud not only of the victory on the basketball court, but the values reflected in that victory. Hard work, determination, and teamwork truly make a difference.

WELCOMING 2ND BATTALION HOME

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. KIRK) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. KIRK. Mr. Speaker, more than 400 Marines serving with the 2nd Battalion of the 24th Marine Regiment will be arriving home in Chicago on April 9, 2005, concluding their 9-month deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom with a hero's welcome at the Allstate Arena. Many organizations, businesses, and families affiliated with the 2nd Battalion will come together to show their support, appreciation to these citizen soldiers who served their country by championing the cause of freedom in Iraq.

The 2nd Battalion of the 21st Marine Regiment was activated on June 1, 2004, to support Operation Iraqi Freedom. The mobilization brought together the Headquarters, Echo, and Weapons Companies, forming the battalion. The unit deployed to Iraq in September 2004 and began conducting support and security operations in northern Babil Province, Iraq.

These dedicated marines operated out of an abandoned chicken processing plant many described as resembling a police station. Their formula for success was to blend their superb military training with many years of law enforcement expertise by their commanding officer. Lieutenant Colonel Mark A. Smith was an Indiana State police. Nearly every platoon included two or three policemen by trade, which proved invaluable in the work of the unit. The battalion used police procedures in its intelligence work, comparing anti-Iraqi forces to criminals back home.

The combination of marine training and police experience allowed the battalion to capture more than 200 insurgents during their deployment. Because of their successful nighttime raids, 2nd Battalion 24 Marines earned the nickname "The Mad Ghosts" from the insurgents operating in Babil Province. Like other U.S. forces operating in Iraq, these marines truly owned the night, and their operations continued until 2nd Battalion was relieved by elements of the U.S. Army in March.

Unfortunately, some of these brave marines made the ultimate sacrifice in the defense of our country. Thirteen marines perished during this mobilization and deployment, 12 as a result of hostile action. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and loved ones of the following marines who will not be returning home with their colleagues this weekend: Corporal Brian Prening, Corporal Robert Warns, Corporal Nathaniel Hammond, Corporal Peter Giannopolos, Lance Corporal Branden Ramey, Lance Corporal Daniel Wyatt, Lance Corporal Richard Warner, Lance Corporal Travis Wichlacz, Lance Corporal Shane O'Donnell, Private First Class Ryan Cantafio, Sergeant Matthew Adams, Lance Corporal Andrew Nowacki, and Private First Class Brent Vroman.

Mr. Speaker, these brave marines, their families and their employers back home all made sacrifices to support freedom and human rights and tolerance around the world. During their service in Iraq, Iraq became the United Nations' newest democracy. We celebrate the citizen soldiers who wear the uniform so proudly to protect their great nation.

To the men and women of the 2nd Battalion of the 24th Marine Regiment, to the unit based in Waukegan, Illinois, we offer you our heartfelt thanks for your service and sacrifice. We thank your loved ones for their sacrifice and support. Welcome home, and most importantly, Semper Fi.

COMMENTS ON THE EPA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Ms. CORRINE BROWN) is recognized for 5 minutes.